The Swedish Chef

When the American Civil War broke out, ending the pioneer period of Swedish immigration, the federal Census recorded some 18,000 Swedish-born persons in the United States. Ten years later, following the first heavy peaks of Swedish immigration in 1868-69, largely due to crop failures in Sweden, the figure was almost five times higher, or 97,332. The rapid increase of Swedish immigration continued. By 1890, following the single decade of the largest Swedish immigration, approximately 478,000 Swedes lived in the United States. During the 1880s alone, some 330,000 persons left Sweden for the United States, the peak year being 1887 with over 46,000 registered emigrants. The pace of immigration remained high after 1890 and by 1910, the U.S. Census recorded over 665,000 Swedish-born persons in the United States.

By the Census in 1890, when some 250,000 persons in the Unites States were classified as second-generation Swedish Americans. During the next decades, this figured increased quickly and by 1910 the second generation had passed the first and numbered 700,000. In 1920, the figure was 824,000.

By 1910 the position of the Midwest as a place of residence for the Swedish immigrants and their children was still strong, but had weakened. Fifty-four percent of the Swedish immigrants and their children now lived in these states, with Minnesota and Illinois dominating. Fifteen percent lived in the East, where the immigrants were drawn to industrial areas in New England. New York City and Worcester, Massachusetts, were two leading destinations. A sizeable Swedish American community had also been established on the West Coast, and in 1910 almost 10 percent of all Swedish Americans lived there. There, the states of Washington and California had the largest Swedish American communities. In Washington, a heavy concentration of Swedish Americans grew up in the Seattle-Tacoma area.

Minnesota became the most Swedish of all states, with Swedish Americans constituting more than 12 percent of Minnesota's population in 1910. In some areas, such as Chisago or Isanti counties on the Minnesota countryside north and northwest of Minneapolis, Swedish Americans made up close to 70 percent of the population. If Minnesota became the most Swedish state in the union, the city of Chicago, was the Swedish American capital. In 1910, more than 100,000 Swedish Americans resided in Chicago, which meant that about 10 percent of all Swedish Americans lived there. At the turn of the century, Chicago was also the second largest Swedish city in the world; only Stockholm had more Swedish inhabitants than Chicago.

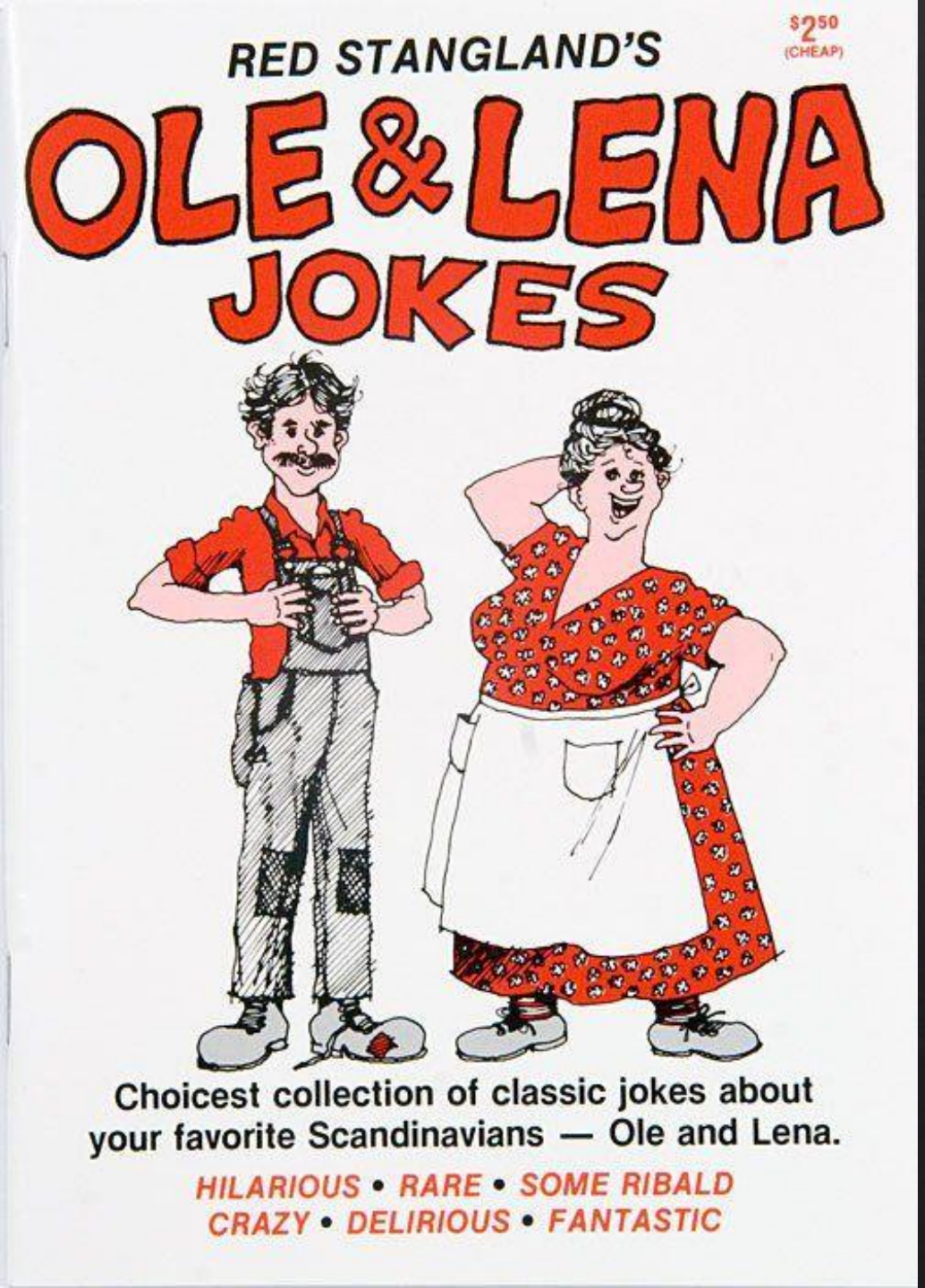
During the period 1820 and 1920 over 1,000,000 from Sweden emigrated to the United States. Only Germany (5,500,000), Ireland (4,400,000), Italy (4,190,000), Austria-Hungary (3,700,000), Russia (3,250,000) and England (2,500,000) had higher-rates of immigration. Swedish immigrants who made an important impact on America include John Ericsson, Birger Sandzen, Carl Eric Wickman, Greta Garbo, Ingrid Bergman, Swan Turnblad, Olof Krans and Nils Johansson.

An investigation carried out in 1978 revealled that since 1820 over 1,272,000 people emigrated to the United States from Sweden. This amounted to 2.6 per cent of the total foreign immigration during this period.

En barndomsbekant, mycket förändrad.

"A childhood acquaintance, much changed": the simple young Swedish peasant women's rapid growth in sophistication in America.

A number of well-established and longtime Swedish Americans visited Sweden in the 1870s, making comments that give historians a window on the cultural contrasts involved. A group from Chicago made the journey in an effort to remigrate and spend their later years in the country of their birth, but changed their minds when faced with the realities of 19th-century Swedish society. Uncomfortable with what they described as the social snobbery, pervasive drunkenness, and superficial religious life of the old country, they returned promptly to America. The most notable visitor was Hans Mattson (1832–1893), an early Minnesota settler who had served as a colonel in the Union Army and had been Minnesota's secretary of state. He visited Sweden in 1868–69 to recruit settlers on behalf of the Minnesota Immigration Board, and again in the 1870s to recruit for the Northern Pacific Railroad. Viewing Swedish class snobbery with indignation, Mattson wrote in his Reminiscences that this contrast was the key to the greatness of America, where "labor is respected, while in most other countries it is looked down upon with slight". He was sardonically amused by the ancient pageantry of monarchy at the ceremonial opening of the Riksdag: "With all respects for old Swedish customs and manners, I cannot but compare this pageant to a great American circus—minus the menagerie, of course.



Question: What do you get when you cross an 18th century poet with the king and a British hotelier?

Answer: The key to the Swedish sense of humour.

Swedes might often come across as a rather amusing lot. But as a rule, their idiosyncrasies raise a bigger smile than their comic timing.

Ten things you should never say to a Swede

Making new friends in Sweden? Here are ten things you should never say to a Swede if you want to remain mates with them.

1. "Oh, I love your cheese and your Alps."
2. "Hurdy gurdy gurdy gurdy."
3. "Is it true that Swedish women are easy?"
4. "Hey, I was just walking past your house, can I come in for a coffee?"
5. "How much do you earn?"
6. "Fancy a joint?"
7. "Do you wanna get the first round?"
8. "Well, Sweden's not really that neutral, is it?"
9. "Norway, Sweden, same thing."
10. "Coffee and cakes? No thanks."

Do not….

Insist that Eurovision is crap, when we know that it clearly is one of the highlights of the year – alongside Christmas and Midsummer.

Ask us ‘How are you’ and don’t wait for our answer.

Be late. We hate lateness. Be on time, every time.

You’re cold? But you’re Scandinavian!

Scandinavian? Do you eat herring, like, all the time?

Enter into a discussion with us about mixer taps versus single taps.

Hisingen English

And then there's the horrible thing called "Hisingen English", the particular accent of **bad Swenglish** that has spread internationally thanks to Volvo, which is based on the island Hisingen in Gothenburg, and "popularised" (if that is the word) by Swedish comedians when they make fun of us.

A few famous examples of Hisingen English are "it took of with a great fart and disappeared like a prick in the sky" (Swedish "fart" means "speed", and "prick" means "dot"); "My name is Jönsson. That is the same as Jonsson but with two pricks"; "Do you have what we in Sweden call a skiftnyckel" (spanner). Pitt (sounds Pit) (nick name: Penis)

Why do so many Swedes speak perfect accentless english?

The Ikea guy in my experience is a total fraud. Almost every Swedish person I've met or seen doing interviews on TV (mostly hockey), even those who are relatively young, speak perfect english. Not only is their english great but they have zero accent and sound like generic Canadians/Americans. I'm assuming in Sweden you learn english from a young age but I still don't understand the accent thing. I've met 17 year olds who just arrived in Canada who literally have no accent. I know it's a silly question but it's something I've always wondered.